

4. LAND USE ELEMENT

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this element is to provide a broad, general direction for land use policy in Lewis County in accordance with Section 36.70A.070 of the Growth Management Act (GMA). It represents the county's policy plan for growth over the next twenty years. The land use element implements many of the goals and objectives in the other plan elements through suggested land use designations and other action recommendations.

The land use element supports the GMA goals. It is based on a vision of Lewis County that concentrates growth in urban areas and rural areas of more intense development, but recognizes the need for economic diversity in the county. Natural resource industries are encouraged, as are protections to private property rights.

The Land Use Element specifically considers the general distribution and location of land uses, the appropriate intensity and density of land uses given development trends; provides policy guidance for commercial and industrial land uses; addresses pre-existing, non-conforming uses; and, establishes land division policies for creating new lots in unincorporated Lewis County. Based on the policy framework in the Plan, the County's development regulations and permitting processes are used to direct growth in order to insure consistency with the provisions of this element.

Growth Management Act Mandate

The development of this chapter was guided in particular by the following GMA Planning Goals:

- *Encourage urban development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner*
- *Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development*
- *Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made; the property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions*
- *Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks*
- *Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability*
- *Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archeological significance*

- *Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts*
- *Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.*
- *Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities, and*
- *Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.*

These Goals, taken in the context of the totality of the thirteen GMA Planning Goals, led to the Countywide Planning Policies (CWPP) that provide specific guidance to the analysis and policies developed in this chapter. The CWPP specific to urban areas, rural areas, and resource lands are included in each of the sub elements.

Lewis County has also opted to include a Rural Element within the Land Use Chapter. This element includes an identification of major issues pertaining to rural development, the projected dispersal of rural population growth, and rural development goals and guidelines.

Existing Conditions

General Context

Lewis County, located in the southwest part of Washington State, touches eight other Washington counties. Grays Harbor, Thurston, and Pierce Counties to the north; Yakima County to the east; and Skamania, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum Counties to the south; and Pacific County to the west. The boundaries are purely political creations except for that portion of the northern boundary that briefly parallels the Nisqually River, and all of the eastern boundary which tracks along the crest of the Cascade Mountains.

Lewis is the largest county in western Washington; it covers 2,452 square miles and measures about 90 miles (east to west) by 25 miles (north to south). The topography varies widely, from the broad, relatively flat and low-lying western section of the county to the Cascade Mountains to the east. Roughly three-fourths of the county is rugged, mountainous and forested. The remainder is characterized by low rolling hills interspersed with rivers and tributaries including the Cowlitz, Chehalis, and Newaukum systems. The major population centers of Chehalis and Centralia, are located on the flood plains of the Chehalis River and its tributaries, including the Skookumchuck and Newaukum rivers.

The county contains portions of the Snoqualmie and Gifford Pinchot National Forests and Mt. Rainier National Park. Approximately one-third of Lewis County is designated as national forest. The mountainous eastern portion of the county tends to protect the western areas from icy temperatures; the Pacific Ocean to the west also serves as a moderating influence on the

weather. Consequently, the climate of the more heavily populated areas is generally moderate with warm dry summers, long rainy winters, and few extremes.

Existing Land Use

Over three-quarters of the land in Lewis County is committed to federal, state, and private resource land uses. This includes 38% in federal and state ownership, primarily for timber and recreational uses. Another 37%, which is privately owned resource lands, is primarily large tracts of property devoted to mineral, agricultural and forestry uses. Only 1% of the land lies within urban areas, with much of that committed to right-of-ways and public uses, or constrained by critical areas. An additional 1% of the land is classified as a "Rural Area of More Intense Development" (LAMIRDS), which includes small towns in unincorporated areas, crossroads, and commercial and subdivision enclaves. Additional designations, such as Master Planned Resorts, are urban designations within rural area. 23% of the land is considered remote rural, much of which is characterized by steep slopes, wetlands and hydric soils. As a result, it is important to note that over 98% of Lewis County is open space or remote rural areas and less than 2% is available for urban or more intense rural development.